

What is claimed is:

1. A method of performing a billing process for the copies or prints produced by a customer of a printing system, the printing system comprising a memory storing product usage data indicating a measurement of the actual use of the printing system, the method comprising:
 - a) in the printing system, accessing the memory to retrieve said product usage data;
 - b) in the printing system, calculating billing data using the retrieved product usage data;
 - c) in the printing system, presenting a bill to the customer based on said billing data;
 - d) in the printing system, receiving authorization information indicating whether the customer authorizes the billing data; and
 - e) if said authorization information indicates that the customer has authorized the billing data, sending a message from the printing system to a billing service, the message including information indicating the authorized billing data.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of receiving authorization information comprises receiving user input from the customer.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of receiving authorization information further comprises in response to an absence of user input, generating default authorization input within the printing system.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein said product usage data indicating a measurement of the actual use of the printing system is a count value indicating the number of copies or prints produced by the customer of the printing system in a given period of time.

5. The method of claim 4, further comprising:

in the printing system, receiving user input from the customer indicating said period of time.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of calculating the billing data is initiated by the customer.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein said message is sent from the printing system to the billing service via a phone line.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein said message is sent from the printing system to the billing service via the internet.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein said message is an electronic mail message.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein said message includes electronic banking data authorizing the billing service to debit from the customer's account.

11. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

a) in the printing system, receiving user input from the customer indicating a password;

b) wherein the step of sending said message from the printing system to a billing service is performed only if the correct password has been entered by the customer.

12. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

a) in the printing system, performing a fingerprint identification to ensure that the billing data is authorized by the correct person; and

b) wherein the step of sending said message from the printing system to the billing service is performed only if the fingerprint identification has revealed that the billing data is authorized by the correct person.

13. Printing system comprising:

a) a memory storing product usage data indicating a measurement of the actual use of the printing system by a customer;

b) a billing control unit for accessing the memory to retrieve said product usage data and for calculating billing data using the retrieved product usage data;

c) a user interface message delivery subsystem for presenting a bill to the customer based on said billing data and for receiving user input from the customer indicating whether the customer authorizes the billing data; and

d) a message sending unit for sending a message from the printing system to a billing service if said user input indicates that the customer has authorized the billing data, the message including information indicating the authorized billing data.

14. The printing system of claim 13, wherein the user interface message delivery subsystem comprises a user interface unit integrated with the printing system.

15. The printing system of claim 11, wherein said product usage data indicating a measurement of the actual use of the printing system is a count value indicating the number of copies or prints produced by the customer of the printing system in a given period of time.

16. The printing system of claim 12, wherein said user interface unit is arranged for receiving user input from the customer indicating said period of time.

17. The printing system of claim 11, wherein said message sending unit is arranged for sending said message via a phone line.

18. The printing system of claim 11, wherein said message sending unit includes circuitry for connecting the printing system to the internet.

19. The printing system of claim 15, wherein said circuitry includes a LAN interface unit.

20. The printing system of claim 11, further comprising a fingerprint identification unit for performing a fingerprint identification process to ensure that the billing data is authorized by the correct person.

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